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MARRIAGE

582 Marriage among the aristocracy is largely endogamous, i.e., within the ruling
565 class, this " family marriage " as the Nupe call it being characterized by a much lower marriage payment than exogamous marriage. Parallel and cross-cousin marriages are encouraged by Moslem custom, though the former is contrary to the traditional marriage rules, so that the scope of " family marriage " is considerably widened. The practice of polygyny, and the fact that the number of wives indicates wealth and status, leads men of wealth and position to marry outside their social group. In order to keep within the Moslem law of four wives only, further wives are relegated to the position of concubines. Ageing wives of the nobility are divorced and replaced by younger girls.[5]

584 According to Temple,[6] betrothal may be as early as 5–7 years for a girl and 10–12 for a boy, but this is not usual. The marriageable age for girls is usually 16–17, but may be as late as 20. Some of the wealthy Bida families marry off their sons very young to enhance their own prestige.[7]

583 Provision of the marriage payment (*ewó yawó*, " money of marriage ") devolves on the head of the family section which is united in the labour unit (*efakó*).[8] It is made up of a series of payments of varying amounts, each of which has a special name. These are: " greeting," " small thanks," " great thanks," " money for henna," and " money for pots," as well as gifts to the bridesmaids and small annual presents of food to the girl's parents. The payments are usually spread over a period of three to five years. They are now valued as a total sum in money which has fluctuated considerably. In pre-British times it was about £3, but later rose to as high as £20, until, in 1934, the Administration intervened and fixed the upper limit at £7. It is becoming customary for the family head to provide the marriage payment only for the eldest son, younger sons having to contribute part of their own, or even bear the whole cost. It is usual for the bride's father to provide her with a dowry, generally consisting of gifts in kind.[9]

[184] Among the Dibo sub-tribe, according to Temple,[10] girls may be betrothed before birth. The marriage payment is high, but may be paid in farm work. The suitor may, however, be outbid by another and his presents returned before the consummation of the marriage.

588 A form of " woman marriage," similar to that practised by the Yoruba of Kabba Province, is recorded by Temple for the Nupe of Gurara District (Lapai Emirate). Here a rich woman goes through a form of marriage with a girl and allows men to have access to her. Any children born belong to the female " husband."[11]

585 The wedding ceremonial occupies a period of 12 days, divided into three phases of four days each. It begins when the bride, assisted by her young female companions, puts on her dress and veil and receives visitors in her house, the climax being reached on the fourth day when professional musicians and drummers are hired and the bride's father offers food and drink to the guests. Among these will be two envoys of the bridegroom, who will be present at a sacrifice offered by the bride's father to ensure a prosperous marriage blessed with children. Among Moslems a mallam makes a public announcement of the marriage at this stage, which legally establishes the bond. In pagan families, however, the bride is taken to her new home by the bridegroom's envoys, where she is received by her parents-in-law and taken to her newly painted sleeping-hut. The next morning the bridegroom's father performs a sacrifice at which the bride's mother's brother is present,

[5] Nadel, 1942, p. 150.
[6] Temple, 1919, p. 322.
[7] Nadel knew of two such cases where the husbands were still pupils at the Government school.
[8] See above, p. 26.
[9] Nadel, 1942, p. 51.
[10] Temple, 1919, p. 114.
[11] Ibid., p. 324.

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586 A woman may equally divorce her husband for crime, or she may get special permission from the Court to marry someone else, if he consents, for the period for which her husband is imprisoned. She cannot obtain divorce on any other ground except that of desertion for three years, or failure to keep her. A man can obtain it for other causes, but rarely does so without good cause, for he loses all the dower money he has paid for his wife. Remarriage is permitted to both sexes after a three months' interval.

581 764 Marriage plays an important part in the social life of the Nupe and is *de rigueur* for both sexes. Until a man has married a virgin with due ceremony, he is accounted a nobody and his fellows will neither speak with him nor listen to him. No one will bury an unmarried woman, even though she be a widow. After much delay this degrading duty devolved upon the dogarai, and now upon Government labourers.

584 The would-be bridegroom calls three times upon the girl's parents, each time bringing with him some small present for the father, mother and girl, and then makes known his intentions. The girl's consent has to be obtained, and the parents generally tell him to go and ask her, without mentioning that he has been first to them. If she agrees she tells him to go to her people and thus it is arranged. Indeed it is sometimes she who first suggests to her father whom she would like to marry and he takes the necessary steps. The engagement is formally recognised when the suitor gives 12s. 6d. in money and two calabashes of kola nuts to the father, and 7s. 6d. in money and one calabash of 583 kola nuts to the mother, for them to distribute amongst the 584 male and female members of their family respectively. From this time on the pretendant must work on his father-in-law's farm or house, together with his friends, two or three times a year, and every big Salla he gives to his bride 5s. worth of clothes and 2s. to plait her hair. This may last for some years, as a boy may be betrothed at the age of ten or twelve and a girl at five or seven. These early engagements are, however, considered undesirable, and the yearly cost to the groom effectually tends to discourage them. A careful count is kept of all that he gives, so that it may be returned if the girl should ultimately refuse to consummate the marriage. Once they are engaged the boy [574] and girl may not play together, which up to the time of marriage they may do with anyone else. In fact a boy and girl may declare themselves "saranchi," or great friends, and they are allowed to go to each other's houses until one or other of them marries.

585 When the time for consummating a marriage has come the groom gives his wife three cloths and a handkerchief, at a minimum value of 30s., and if she does not like those he has selected, she returns them and he must send others till she is satisfied. At the same time he gives her parents £2 10s., which they spend on

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an outfit for their daughter, pots and pans, mats, etc. A rich man gives something under £4, and spends perhaps as much as £9 or £10 on cloths. If he is unable to raise all this money at once an arrangement can be made in the Alkali's Court, by which he is bound over to make up the deficit within a given time, and so long always as he gives his wife 1,250 cowries, value 6d., for her first chop money, they may marry at once.

The dowry is sometimes remitted in cases where the father-in-law can afford to support the young couple, or a man may marry his first cousin without payment. Where no dower is given the marriage is known as "salaka."

Girls do not marry as a rule before they are sixteen or seventeen and often not till they are twenty, men when they are eighteen or twenty, or later, according to their wealth. The customs of the aboriginal pagan Nupe* differ slightly. The betrothal being arranged by the heads of the respective families, and when it is agreed upon, the boy's guardian assembles the whole family and names the bride in their presence and in that of the prospective groom. All presents are given through the guardian, whom the suitor accompanies on his visits to the bride's people, but he does not see the bride herself. A week before the marriage is consummated both parties remain in their houses, the groom to receive the salutations of his friends, the bride to stain her hands and feet with henna, and to powder her face and body with camwood. On the wedding day the suitor's friends escort him to the hut of his betrothed, where they talk, but she sits silent until the groom gives her presents, which is a signal for the departure of his friends. When the groom emerges he proclaims whether or not he has found his bride chaste. A feast follows, and the groom is escorted back to his house by his friends, where he is followed later by his bride, who is attended by women carrying her outfit. The couple live together in one hut until she conceives, when her husband builds himself another house.

The wedding festivities for a virgin are carried on for a week, day and night. For the first three days they take place in her own people's house, and on the fourth day she goes to her husband's house, where the feasting continues for another four days and four nights. Seven days of seclusion follow, when neither man nor wife may be seen, and after this he is allowed the full honours of a husband. The bride, however, may not go out till three months have elapsed.

The ceremony is of a very much humbler description for a second marriage.

In the Gurara District of Nupe (Lapai Emirate), a curious custom exists, which, with minor modifications is practised

* Sapke and Mokwa. The differences only have been mentioned, not the similarities.